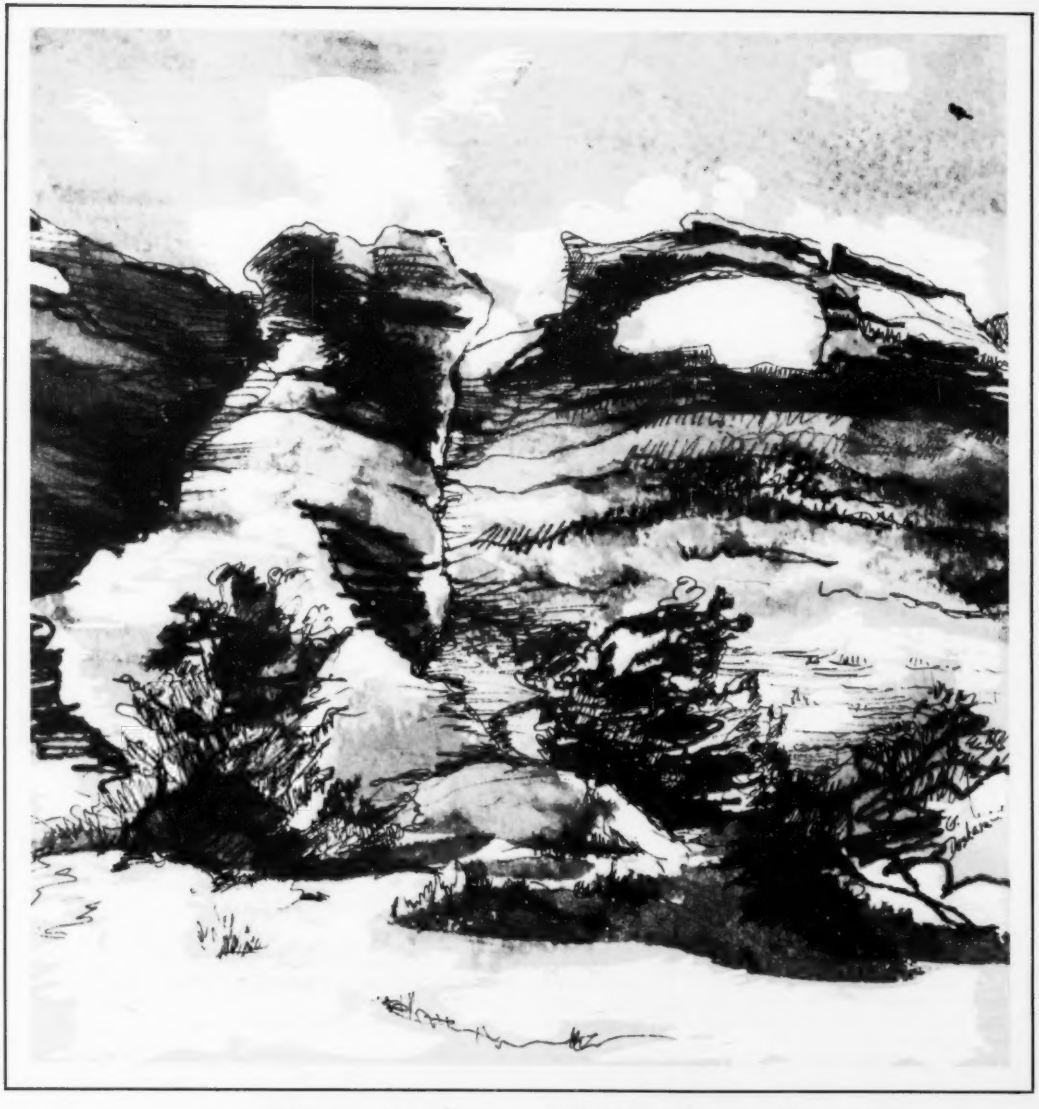
Our Public Lands

Winter 1981



The Arches of Rattlesnake Canyon

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibility for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources."

The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.

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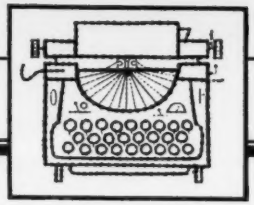


News Highlights

Alaska Oil and Gas

About six million acres--an area the size of Vermont--on the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A) has been selected by BLM for industry and government assessment that will lead to the largest on-shore competitive oil and gas lease sale offering in U.S. history. Up to two million acres could be sold during the first lease sale, targeted for December 1981.

Since 1977 the U.S. Geological Survey has explored the field with drilling contractors, resulting in the discovery of a small oil field near Umiat in its southeast portion and several small gas fields.

Deeded Mining Claims

BLM has received numerous inquiries from citizens who are prospective buyers of "deeded" mining claims. Speculators offer the claims on Federal lands for sale. The offer hints broadly that the claim entitles one to build a residence and live on the land and implies that ownership of the land goes with the claim. This is not true.

A claim entitles rights to the land only for the purpose of mining and does not constitute ownership. Most of these claims being sold may possess negligible mineral value. Title to the land can be acquired only after discovery of a valuable mineral in sufficient quantities to warrant mining, and buildings on the land may only be associated with mining or mineral exploration. A structure to be used for residential or recreational purposes does not qualify and could lead to trespass proceedings.

Be aware of what you are buying before you sign any agreement. A mining claim entitles you only to the mineral rights and a legitimate discovery of a valuable mineral resource is necessary to validate any mining claim.

SCS Meeting Set

"Land, People and Policy: The Western Connection" will be the theme of the 36th annual meeting of the Soil Conservation Society of America, August 2-5, 1981, at the Sheraton Spokane Hotel, Spokane, Washington.

The program will focus on natural resource management issues in the western U.S. and Canada from the perspective of national and world needs. Speakers will examine how policy can be made to minimize interregional conflicts in natural resource use.

The Soil Conservation Society of America is a private, nonprofit scientific and educational association dedicated to advancing the science and art of good land use. Call (515) 289-2331 for details.

Unique New Windmills

A new generation of windmills with long, slender blades may soon take over the job of pumping water on desert range land.

While the old-style, broad-bladed steel windmills are heavy and require special equipment for installation and maintenance, the new breed can be set up by one ranch hand. This windmill is aluminum and its piping is plastic.

The first of these new windmills is already in place near Ajo, Ariz. on public land administered by BLM, and under grazing permit to rancher Jeff Cameron.

Other windmills are planned for BLM-administered grazing lands near Bouse in Yuma Co. and near the Hassayampa River in northern Maricopa Co.

Unlike the old-style windmills that suck water out of the ground, the new windmills drive a small air compressor that forces air into the well and water out of the ground.

An advantage of the new windmill is that it need not be set up right over the well. Wells are often in desert washes, where ground water is closest to the surface. Yet the windiest spot may not be down in the wash. The new windmill can be a quarter of a mile away from a well site. A wind as low as ten miles per hour will pump water.

Air hose descends into the well which can be as far as a quarter of a mile away from the windmill.

A Year in the Life of The Bureau of Land Management

Jack Reed

The public lands offer much for history buffs. Boy Scouts find a rusted lantern, a remnant of a former desert stagecoach station in Arizona.

Those who travel the highways and byways of the West are nearly always impressed by the immensity of the land. The seemingly endless vistas of deserts, plains, wooded ridges or stark mountain ranges create breath-taking horizons. People who experience the wide open spaces of the West sense a feeling of freedom.

From arid deserts to dripping forests, and from rolling plains to cloud scratching mountain peaks, the public lands stretch from the Mexican border to the northern tip of Alaska and from scattered islands in the Great Lakes to the booming surf of the rugged Pacific shore.

Many Americans perhaps do not realize that 337 million acres of this magnificent land actually belongs to them.

And these are not just idle acres. Public domain lands have provided the base from which many national parks, national forests, wildlife refuges and military posts were established. Much of the land is valued by ranchers for livestock grazing. Timber production, energy resources, cultural resources and recreation are among the many uses of these lands. Myriads of wildlife make their homes on the public lands.

A look at a typical year's activities on, and management of, the public lands is a revealing eye-opener.

For example, BLM collects about $5 billion a year for the U.S. Treasury. This money comes from mining and mineral leases and royalties; sales of timber, public lands and materials; fees and commissions; grazing and right-of-way leases. On the other hand, only about $450 million (equal to only nine per cent of the receipts) is appropriated by Congress for the Bureau's operating expenses for a year—which means a return to the Treasury of about $11 for each dollar spent.

Most of the money—more than $4 billion—results from mining activities on the public lands. The Bureau has more than 500 coal leases on some 800,000 acres of the public lands where there is an estimated 16.5 billion tons of coal on deposit. Probably half of the Nation's coal reserves are in the West and 60 percent of that coal is on public lands.

The Bureau is involved in oil and gas leasing—both on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) and on-shore lands in the West. The Bureau is responsible for the management of 1.4 billion acres of submerged lands on the Outer Continental Shelf. Onshore, the Bureau is responsible for leasing on

209 million acres of potential oil lands. Since 1953, more than 18,000 oil and gas wells have been drilled on some 3,700 OCS leases; about five billion barrels of oil and 45 trillion cubic feet of gas have been produced. On-shore, approximately 10,000 oil and gas leases are issued a year by BLM, mostly from operation of the Bureau's simultaneous oil and gas leasing program (sometimes referred to as "Uncle Sam's lottery"). Under that latter program, leases which expire or lapse become available for other persons to lease. Each application card (which cost $10, to pay for processing) is put into a drum and those whose cards are drawn may acquire oil and gas lease rights by paying $1 per acre annual rental. However, there is no guarantee there are any oil or gas deposits in lands available through the simultaneous oil and gas leasing program; if there were indications of a deposit, the lands would be offered under competitive bidding.

In addition to coal, oil and gas, the public lands have many other minerals and ores, including gold, phosphate, uranium, oil shale and bituminous tar sands. More than a million mining claims on public lands have been filed with BLM.

Some people have acquired a mining claim with the expectation that they could use it to build a house or cabin on the property, which isn't the case. The claim makes it possible for a person to obtain the mineral but gives that person no surface rights, except to do whatever is necessary for the actual mining of that mineral. To acquire surface rights, the person would have to "patent" the claim and obtain a deed.

Historically, the public lands have provided many opportunities for citizens to acquire land for residential, farming and business purposes. But, since Congress, in 1976, passed the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) most homestead laws were repealed. And, because the Federal Government is required by FLPMA to get "fair market value" for any lands which it does decide to make available to the public, usually it is easier for a person to deal in the regular marketplace. such as through a real estate agent.

Lands are available under certain circumstances for either purchase or lease by State and local governments and recognized non-profit organizations. Lands are transferred each year from BLM to State, county and local governments for such purposes as parks, garbage dumps, airports and rifle ranges.

Recreation is the most popular use of the BLM-administered public lands. Tens of millions of recreation visits are made each year for sight-seeing, backpacking, hunting, fishing, off-road vehicle use, rock-hounding and other pleasures. More than 200 developed campgrounds and 235 primitive campgrounds are now open for outdoor recreationists without paying any fee. But if someone plans to make a profit, then the Bureau charges for the use and issues a permit. In a typical year BLM will issue about 3,000 free recreation permits.

BLM manages the largest number of cultural (archaeological and historical) resources, including southwestern prehistoric ruins, historic ghost towns, aboriginal rock art, early wagon roads and trails, and abandoned military posts. There are an estimated 400,000 cultural sites on the public lands. In addition, the Bureau administers scenic areas, float-boat and white water rivers, natural areas, and sites popular with off-road vehicle enthusiasts.

Although the individual States are responsible for the wildlife, BLM manages the habitat where the wildlife spend a considerable part of each year. Some 3,500 species of fish and 2,700 species of wildlife live at least part of each year on the public lands. In a year's

(Above) Recreation on the public lands is rapidly growing in importance. Facilities such as this one at Willow Springs Recreation Site, Nevada are being expanded each year to meet increasing demands. (Below) About two percent of the Nation's timber production came from BLM-administered public lands in 1980.

Trees were planted on 28,500 acres of public land in 1980.

time, BLM may improve more than three million acres of wildlife habitat, manipulating (through seeding, plowing, burning and other methods) more than 10,000 acres; installing 100's of miles of protective fence; developing about 300 water facilities—and maintaining an equal number of facilities already built.

One species of wild animals receives special attention: wild horses and burros. BLM and the Forest Service have a responsibility from Congress to manage the more than 60,000 wild horses and burros on the lands administered by the two agencies. As a result, BLM captures about 6,000 wild horses and burros a year and allows persons to "adopt" them, so their numbers do not multiply and cause overgrazing problems.

More than 13,000 ranchers have permits to graze more than 4.5 million head of domestic livestock on the public lands—including about two million cattle and two and one-half million sheep. To increase domestic livestock grazing on the public lands, BLM in a year will construct more than 200 water developments, build nearly 200 miles of fence and treat vegetation on about 10,000 acres.

In another of its multiple use activities, the Bureau administers valuable timberland, particularly in Oregon. Twenty three and a half million acres of public lands are suitable for commercial timber production. About two percent of the nation's timber production comes from BLM administered lands each year—enough to build about 86,000 three-bedroom homes. In addition to harvesting mature timber, BLM practices brush control, development of better tree stock, salvage of dead or dying trees and reforestation. More than 28,000 acres of trees are planted by the Bureau each year.

In addition to the commercial timber, the public lands provide Christmas trees, fence posts, firewood and edible pinon nuts. But protecting the forestry products is another responsibility and BLM, in an average year, controls nearly 2,500 fires which burn over a half-million acres.

The Bureau's programs don't end there, either. Some personnel must spend their time preventing illegal trespass actions on the public lands. Others assist State and local governments in obtaining public lands for such community needs as parks and recreation areas, education purposes and health facilities.

And before any land can be transferred, it has to be identified. So the Bureau has cadastral surveyors who survey about 7,000 miles a year.

All of this is accomplished through a modern planning system. As a result of public participation, the Bureau determines what should be done with or on public lands. The plans are being continually modified to meet changing conditions.

As a nation, Americans once owned nearly two billion acres of public lands. In the course of national expansion and development, public lands were disposed of by the Federal government to States and local governments, educational institutions, industries and private citizens. Some public lands were set aside as national parks, forests, wildlife refuges, wilderness areas and military installations. Hence, today the Bureau of Land Management administers some 350 million acres of public lands—about one-fifth of the nation's total land area.

As America seeks ways to meet growing needs for energy, food and fiber, timber, water, and recreational opportunities, national attention has turned to the treasure house of resources of the public lands.

Jack Reed is a Public Information Specialist with BLM's Office of Public Affairs, Washington, D.C.

More than two million cattle and about two and one-half millon sheep are grazed on public lands.

Energy Independence

The Role of the Public Lands

With about six percent of the world's population, the United States consumes nearly one-half of the globe's energy. Because of our high energy needs, our Nation's socio-economic structure would obviously falter without judicious use, conservation and search for additional energy sources required for manufacturing, agriculture and transportation.

Our dependence on foreign oil has mushroomed over the years. The United States currently imports more than 44.1 percent of its petroleum needs. The cost of energy imports—about $60 billion in 1979—is steadily increasing and adversely affecting the country's balance of payments, as well as its defense and international political position.

Within the boundaries of the public lands lie a vast portion of our Nation's known energy reserves, including coal, oil and gas, oil shale, uranium, and geothermal energy.

We currently obtain from Federal lands, including the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS), about 21 percent of the marketed gas and 16.5 percent of the total crude oil and gas liquids produced in the United States.

The Outer Continental Shelf is expected to remain a significant source of oil and gas in the future. From 1953 through 1980, this frontier area under the seas produced 5.4 billion barrels of oil and 49.2 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. Proven recoverable reserves amount to 3.4 billion barrels of oil and 36 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, but the estimated potential runs up to 50 billion barrels of oil and 185 trillion cubic feet of gas.

Geothermal deposits deep below the earth's surface are a realistic source of energy for many uses. Heat energy stored in subsurface brines, and geothermal steam pressures from controlled wells can be used to generate electricity, to desalt water, and to recover minerals. The city of San Francisco, for example, already is receiving a significant amount of its electrical power from plants built to generate electricity by harnessing natural geysers. More than 58 million acres of public lands have been identified as being potentially valuable for production of this energy source.

The public lands also are called upon to provide sites and routes for the facilities necessary to process, generate, convert, and transport energy in desired forms where it is needed. As energy fuels of the public lands enter the Nation's energy system in the years ahead, energy fuel development and energy sites will become a major use of the public domain and will also impact on the communities nearby.

Onshore Federal lands contain vast amounts of fossil fuels. Half of the Nation's coal reserves are in the West and 60 percent of that coal is on public lands. Public lands in six States—Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, and Alaska—contain enormous coal reserves. In addition, by reserving the mineral estate at the time the land passed into private title, the Federal Government controls the leasing and reserving of coal and the other minerals underlying much private land.

Public lands in Utah, Colorado, and Wyoming have the largest known oil shale reserves in the Free World. Tar sand deposits on Federal land in Utah may soon begin to contribute their share of energy to the Nation's needs as legal questions are cleared and technology makes tar sand development feasible.

A promising site for the discovery of oil and gas reserves is the region known as the Overthrust Belt alongside the Rocky Mountains in Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Utah, and Ne-

vada. After FLPMA's passage, 11.4 million acres of public land in the Belt were subject to wilderness inventory to determine where wilderness characteristics existed and which lands ought to be studied further for possible inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The Bureau accelerated its wilderness inventory on these Overthrust Belt lands in order to cause the least interference with the petroleum industry's continuing search for new domestic sources of oil and gas. Nearly 10 million acres of public lands in the Belt have been identified as lacking wilderness characteristics and have been returned to other uses, including energy development.

The abundance of oil and gas on Federal lands in Alaska and the western States is well documented. According to U.S. Geological Survey figures, there were 1,810 development oil and gas wells on Federal lands in 1979 and 399 exploratory wells. A total of 10,484 oil and gas wells were drilled on all lands in the United States.

As Americans seek ways to meet energy needs, national attention will increasingly be turned to the resources of the public lands. These lands can play a central role in the life of the Nation. They contain vast resources that we can depend upon to sustain us into the next century.

BLM's Coal Program in Action

Evaline A. Olson

The Nation's increasing energy demands require significant actions to meet those needs. The leasing of 450 million tons of coal reserves managed by the Federal Government is a part of the solution.

The Secretary of the Interior, in June 1979, established a new Federal coal management program. This action ended the eight-year history of starts, stops, and restarts of Federal coal policymaking (see Our Public Lands, Spring 1980). From this beleaguered setting emerged the first long-term coal lease sale since the administratively imposed moratorium declared in 1971 by then Secretary of the Interior Rogers C. B. Morton.

In January 1981, when 11,282 acres of coal-bearing public lands in Colorado and Wyoming were put on the block for competitive leasing, industry was ready. They came, cash in hand, in the amount of nearly $1.74 million dollars to bid on leases for about 88 million tons of estimated recoverable coal reserves.

In Colorado, a standing-room-only crowd of 95 persons heard a total of eight sealed bids read with the new high bids totaling $789,572 for 1,998 acres of public land that contains 56 million tons of estimated recoverable reserves. In Wyoming, 39 attendees saw nine sealed bids opened with high bids amounting to $950,855 on 9,285 acres that represented about 32 million tons of strippable reserves.

Incorporated in this historic first lease sale was another "first." In Colorado, the small business set-aside Grassy Creek tract of 440 acres, about 10 miles southeast of Hayde, went to the apparent successful bidder, Mt. Harris Coal Company. That bid of $51.57 per acre amounted to $22,690.80 for estimated recoverable reserves of 1.8 million tons. Within the new Federal coal program is the provision for coal tracts to be specifically designed for bid by small coal businesses as defined by the Small Business Administration. This set-aside will be a regular feature of the coal leasing program.

High bidders on the other two Colorado tracts were Empire Energy Corporation, with a bid of $405 per acre on 682 acres, and Consolidation Coal Company's bid of $560 per acre on 876 acres, for total bids of $276,210 and $490,672, respectively.

In Wyoming, high bidders were Medicine Bow Coal Company at $52 per acre on 4,443 acres containing about 13.2 million tons of strippable reserves, for a total bid of $231,036. Capital

Development Company's total bid of $305,944 covered 1,832 acres; or $167 per acre. The third lease was bid at $137.50 per acre by Ark Land Company, or $413,875 on 3,010 acres containing about 10.9 million tons of strippable reserves.

This lease sale came about through an innovative approach to addressing both national and regional concerns. Rising to the challenge, a regional coal team was developed by the Secretary of the Interior that included representatives of Governors Ed Herschler of Wyoming and Richard D. Lamm of Colorado and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Colorado and Wyoming State Directors. Throughout the process of hammering out the decisions that would place the tracts on the market, the team retained a solid commitment to its recognition of the legitimacy of all uses of the public lands.

The BLM's good neighbor program, at work throughout the proceedings, saw close cooperation develop with the U.S. Geological Survey and other Federal and State agencies. Tight schedules were met; economic, environmental, and social impact analyses of 16 tracts were completed through a desire to reach a mutually acceptable goal—Federal coal leasing.

A recent world coal study suggests that the world's reliance on coal as an energy source might have to increase from approximately 2.5 billion metric tons a year to six or seven billion tons a year in the next 30 years. The U.S. has nearly 30% of the world's economically feasible recoverable coal reserves. National energy reliance on the coal resources of the West will be accelerated. In the future, more public lands will be leased at a faster rate for the development of this vast resource. In a recent interview, Secretary of the Interior James G. Watt said, "On coal leasing, for example, we will increase the rate of lease sales, the number of sales, and the size of the land parcels. Our environmental assessment will be more thorough and will be done more quickly."

The second regional coal lease sale was held April 30, 1981, and a third sale will be held in October 1981.

Evaline Olson is a Public Information Specialist with BLM's Colorado State Office.

Standing room only audience follows the first long-term competitive coal lease conducted by the Bureau of Land Management since the 1971 moratorium.

No Species Too Small

Stream improvement is a part of BLM's ongoing wildlife program

Neil Armantrout

Explorer Creek is not long. It originates in the coastal mountains of southern Oregon and runs only about three miles before flowing into Vincent Creek.

But once, to many trout and salmon, the small stream was the most important place in the world.

Each year, mature fish came from the Pacific Ocean, up Smith River into Vincent Creek, and from there into Explorer Creek. There, year after year they spawned. After depositing their eggs on the gravel they died, leaving eggs to hatch young that would carry on the cycle from generation to generation.

In the early 1950's the cycle was broken. A road was built across the mouth of Explorer Creek to provide access to timber in the Smith River Basin. After the road was completed, a culvert, placed in the road fill was well above the original bed of the stream. This created a drop of ten feet, a falls too high for the salmon and trout to pass. Cut off from their traditional spawning beds, these fish disappeared from Explorer Creek.

In 1973, personnel attached to the Bureau of Land Management's Coos Bay, Oregon District began efforts to reestablish the fish runs. A plan was developed by Fisheries Biologist John Anderson. Following that plan, a short fish ladder, replacing the single 10-foot jump, was built from Vincent Creek up to the outlet of the Explorer Creek culvert. The ladder provided a series of short jumps the fish were able to manage.

During the first spawning season after the ladder was installed, coho salmon, steelhead and searun cutthroat trout were seen spawning in the creek. Later, young fish appeared and headed downstream toward the sea. The life cycles of the fish in Explorers Creek had started again.

John Anderson, Coos Bay District Fisheries Biologist, holds a steelhead taken from Explorer's Creek following development of the fish ladder.

The Explorer Creek fish ladder is not a project that attracts a lot of attention, but it is a good example of the stream improvements being carried out in 11 BLM districts in Oregon and Washington. Most are small, low-cost projects, designed to improve habitat for resident fish populations or to open access to

streams that have been blocked to spawning fish. Individually, the results seem insignificant, but collectively, they are impressive.

More than 100 projects have been completed in recent years. They range from fish ladders to the removal of log jams, from the development of pools in shallow streams to clearing obstructions. As a result, many miles of stream, once inaccessible to fish life, now support fish runs and healthy populations of aquatic life. Streams that were once inhospitable for fish during the heat of summer, because of a lack of pools and shade, now support fish population all year. Gravel, important for spawning and food production, is now available.

As a result, more fish are being produced for the growing number of sportsmen and commercial salmon fishermen.

Sportsmen have responded in many ways. Many BLM projects were developed and carried out with assistance from the public. For example, the North Fork of Butte Creek, a tributary of the famous Rogue River, was once blocked by falls. With help from Rogue River Fly Fishers Inc. and Oregon State biologists, personnel at BLM's Medford, Oregon District Office built a passage around the falls. Upstream, log jams and other barriers were removed and many miles of once inaccessible habitat were opened and now contribute to the fishery.

Most of these projects would not have been possible without the active assistance of State fishery biologists in Oregon and Washington. In all its fisheries development, BLM has worked in close cooperation with State agencies. Nowhere is this cooperation better demonstrated than in the South Fork of the John Day River.

The South Fork of the John Day River begins in central Oregon and flows north. Eventually it joins the Columbia River. Steelhead from the Pacific Ocean migrate up the Columbia and into the South Fork and its tributaries to spawn. Native trout are present the year around. Because of grazing, timber harvest and fire, the

(Above) Installing a trash catcher in Whitehorse Creek, Vale District. Trash collects on the upstream side of the catcher as gravel is washed downstream, forming a pool. (Right) A completed fish ladder at the mouth of Star Gulch, Medford District. (Below) A newly installed Alaskan Steeppass fish ladder.

quality of the fisheries' habitat has declined. To rehabilitate the South Fork, BLM's Burns, Oregon District Office has joined forces with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service and Soil Conservation Service. The project is now known as the Murderer's Creek Coordinated Resource Management Plan.

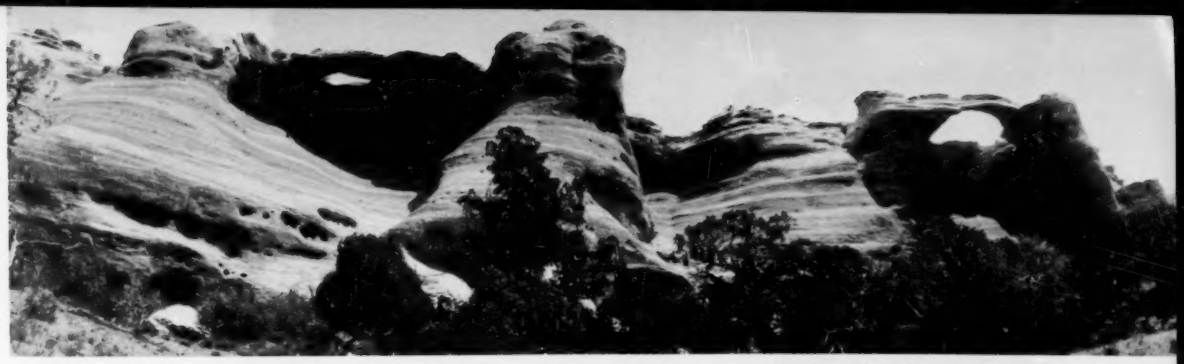
Major efforts were made to restore and stabilize eroding stream banks. Bank deflectors were installed and streamside vegetation was protected. To provide cover for fish, large boulders were placed in the stream. Junipers were cut from nearby slopes and placed on exposed banks to improve forage and lure grazing deer and livestock away from streamside vegetation. Brush from the juniper was anchored to deflect currents that were causing the banks to erode. The brush also caught silt and provided a protected area where willows and alders could grow. By the time the juniper had rotted away, new living shrubs were well established and ready to provide natural protection for the banks.

Stream improvement is a part of the Bureau of Land Management's ongoing wildlife program. Projects are identified as a result of BLM inventories or as they are recommended by the public or by State biologists. In Oregon and Washington, habitats range from coastal areas to alpine mountain areas to the high deserts of eastern Oregon. Many kinds of projects are possible. Some projects expand the habitat available to fish; others seek to rehabilitate habitat diminished from the more productive quality of the past.

Stream improvement projects are designed to help those species with populations in decline or those confined to a limited range. In eastern Oregon, the Whitehorse, the Little Whitehorse and Willow are neighboring creeks containing a small population of unique cutthroat trout found nowhere else in the world. To protect these threatened and endangered species, the Bureau's Vale, Oregon District Office reduced the amount of grazing along the streams and built a series of wire trash-catchers that helped increase the number and size of pools in the streams. Deeper pools and more vegetation for shading along the stream banks helped reduce high summer water temperatures characteristic of the desert climate of southeastern Oregon. Maintaining low temperature is essential in protecting fish in desert climates. In Oregon, BLM uses stream maintenance to evaluate its improvement program. In this way it finds out which projects are successful and determines why some are more successful than others. Information is accumulated that helps BLM's fisheries biologists design more effective structures for new projects identified through inventory. The goal in each case is to increase or improve the habitat available for fish. Collectively, the projects are an important tool to protect and improve fisheries resources on the public lands.

Neil Armantrout is a Fisheries Biologist in the BLM Oregon State Office.

Juniper cuttings are installed to protect exposed banks, of the John Day River.



Photography by George Crouter

The Arches of Rattlesnake Canyon

Zeke Scher

Reprinted with permission from Empire Magazine

They were confident there was something of national significance in that remote western Colorado canyon, but the two U.S. Bureau of Land Management officials had glimpsed it in only a few flights over the rugged area. It would take a climb down the steep canyon walls and a hike over the four-mile length to be sure.

The find was indeed significant—the greatest concentration of natural rock arches in Colorado, one of the best in the world and second only to southeastern Utah's renowned sandstone formations.

The fact that one Colorado canyon has more than a dozen of nature's rare stone carvings is no more surprising than their continued obscurity into the 1980s. They are 110 miles from Moab, Utah, and famous Arches National Park, but they are still within the desert region one mile above sea level known as the Colorado Plateau. Time has sculptured most of the arches into the same type of rock at both places, Entrada sandstone—multicolored, of infinite shapes and fascinating beauty.

Perhaps most surprising of all about this Colorado site is the pristine environment of the canyon housing the arches while only 15 air miles from Grand Junction, is the largest city on the West Slope. Colorado National Monument, with a different set of colorful cliffs and tall spires, is midway between Grand Junction and remote Rattlesnake Canyon.

That is what they call it now—Rattlesnake Canyon. Old plats of the General Land Office once showed a Rattlesnake Creek flowing northward through Horsethief Canyon to the Grand River (which was renamed the Colorado River in 1921). U.S. Bureau of Reclamation river surveys in the 1940s dropped the creek name, but still referred to the canyon south of the river as Horsethief.

Present topographical maps of the U.S. Geological Survey, dating to 1962, "created" Rattlesnake Canyon and transferred the name of Horsethief Canyon to an eight-mile stretch of the Colorado River westward from the end of the Grand Valley. So what's in a name?

None of the early records mentioned any hidden geologic treasures south of the river in "that" canyon. It is believed that original Rattlesnake Creek was named not for any resident rattlers but for the cap rock on a pinnacle near the canyon mouth which resembles the erect head of a snake ready to strike.

Since it is easier to enter the canyon from the Colorado River than from the mesa tops, it is likely the unknown namer saw the "rattlesnake" without exploring "Arch Avenue" a few miles up the canyon. While the water approach is easier, that requires logistics. Our expedition would go "the hard way."

The canyon is easy to spot on topographical maps, but getting there on the ground is something else. It is a 26-mile, two-hours-plus trip over rutted one-car-width, hunter-access roads requiring a four-wheel-drive vehicle. The "plus" refers to the luck (or experience) required to find the canyon, since no directional signs exist.

We had experience in the expedition leaders, David Allen Jones and Wade Leighton Johnson, of the BLM's Grand Junction District Office. Jones, 37, a graduate of Palisade, Colo., High School and Colorado State University, is the district manager. Johnson, 36, a graduate of Denver's George Washington High School, Univer-

sity of Colorado and Colorado State University Graduate School (recreational planning), is the wilderness coordinator.

Neither BLM man previously had the opportunity to go into the canyon—only fly over it—but each found it on this first try, noting a landmark at the head of the canyon and finding an appropriate end-of-the-trail parking spot at a canyon rim.

Immediately in front of us as we stepped over the canyon rim was a magnificent huge arch through which we would have to descend to reach the canyon floor. A slight obstacle: The path down to the underside of the arch and from there to the canyon floor was almost straight down—about a 60-degree decline—over smooth, slick rock. Things could always be worse: the rock could have been wet. Fortunately, it was bone dry.

Wade came prepared. He whipped out a long, sturdy rope, looped it around my waist and offered an anchor as I went down the red rock by the seat of my pants to one of several narrow benches above the arch. He was able to make it down to the brightly hued arch without a rope.

Looking through the arch from above was like looking through the wrong end of a telescope at a cluster of small pinon-juniper trees far below. A scattering of published reports over the past decade and BLM records had provided some information on what to expect in Rattlesnake Canyon, and this formation was referred to as Cedar Tree.

There was no record of this arch ever being measured. So we did it. Walking on a narrow lip on each side of the base of the arch, Jones and I stretched a tape across the chasm (the rock wall seems to drop out under the center of the arch). It was 76 feet across. Now for the height.

I squat-walked and slid down to the cedar tree base while Johnson climbed atop the arch. Jones remained on a bench under the arch to catch the tape at more or less the midpoint. Dropping the heavy roll-up tape seemed like a bad idea, especially since catching it on the incline was unlikely. So Johnson let out the rope and swung it into Jones; then Jones got the rope and threw an end down to me. We measured the rope (52 feet) and figured the arch's height: 95 feet. A 10-story arch, 25 yards wide, isn't bad by any standard.

It was a mild day, but in the confines of the canyon walls, with sparse vegetation and light sandy soil, the heat was starting to build up. An occasional breeze, however, offered relief. We had heard of oven-like temperatures in July and August and persistent biting gnats that love the heat—and hate visitors—but we were spared that in May.

Our plan was to follow the east side of the canyon as it twists and turns generally northward toward the Colorado River, and then climb to the mesa top and find a short cut back to our vehicle. There were no trails—there was no sign of man whatever in the canyon—but the map "promised" we were bound to reach the end of the canyon if we just kept walking.

About a quarter mile into the canyon, in silence broken only by our voices, Johnson pointed to an arch high up the canyon wall in a crevice. He had seen this one from a helicopter. Crawling as far as he could go up the crease, he pointed to what he called "the trap door" at the top, a span about 30 feet across. It was a wild formation in a wild locale.

We saw little evidence of wildlife in the canyon except for an occasional lizard or itinerant bird. The upper canyon has been used for spring grazing of cattle. A variety of wildflowers and cactus blooms brightened the rocky landscape. There was plenty of serenity and solitude—everywhere.

The canyon had us constantly turning—it could have been named rattlesnake just for that—and it did a good job of concealing what comes next. So it was stunning when we rounded a bend and suddenly faced what the records listed only as "Big." In front of a wall of horizontal pink, purple, white and brown sandstone bands stretched a flat, smooth arch which we estimated as at least 80 feet across, some 120 feet above the ground.

"I was aware there were some arches in the canyon, but I didn't expect as much as this," said Jones in awe. "How many years did it take to form something like this? Millions?"

Johnson also was mightily impressed. "In making the wilderness inventory, I had flown over here several times, but I didn't get a feel for the arches until now. Much of the beauty is this wildland setting, especially the high degree of naturalness."

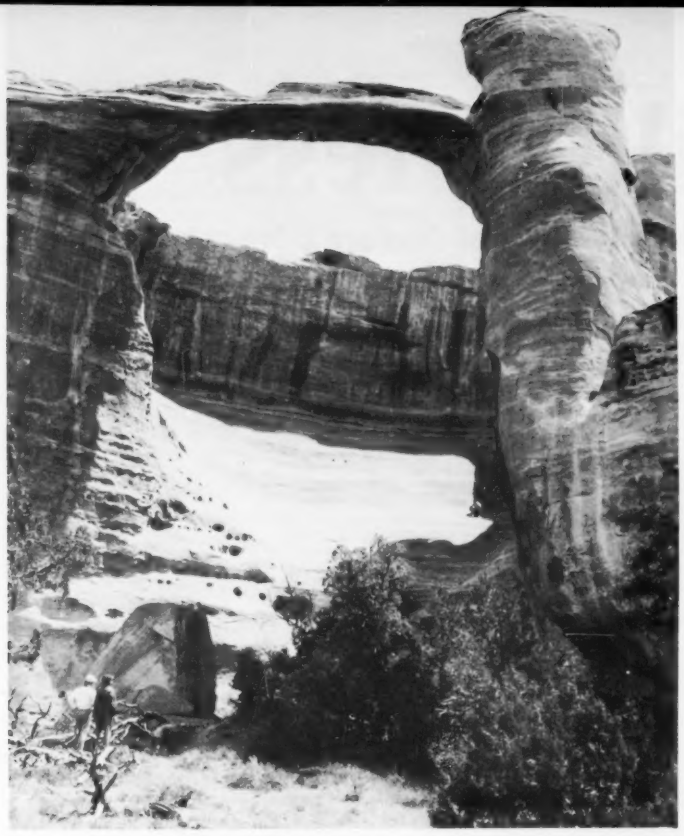
As if to hug this queen of their public domain, the BLM men clambered up under the big arch. A steep incline limited the approach, and it is doubtful if anyone has ever been atop it.

Many eroding walls showed arches in the making throughout the canyon. Another million years and Arches National Park can pack it in. Some arches are in the canyon top rims, and a wayward hiker along the edge of the mesa could step through and find the next step a very hard one to take.

Around the next bend a series of high arches came in rapid succession. The first one—a 20-foot-wide curving arch with a curving bench about five feet below it—looked like a giant eye in the sandstone.

The hike down the canyon frequently was delayed when a rock formation offered a respite of shade, or when a bright flower flourishing in the sandy soil was an irresistible photo subject. There is more to Rattlesnake Canyon than arches, but the successful search for the next arch is the most fun.

We had been hiking about four hours when we climbed a high bench overlooking the Colorado River. It was lunch time, and we enjoyed the scenic panorama—the distant Bookcliffs, the meandering Colorado, the broad river valley . . . and Interstate 70. Across the canyon we could see a double arch with one rocky arm across the top of the rim and another on the side of the alcove



beneath. How many more are there here?

Later we dropped in elevation from 5,600 feet at the head of the canyon to 4,400 feet at the river at the northeast end of the canyon. Closer to the water we came upon willow and cottonwood, leaving most of the pinon-juniper behind. It is still open country and the hiker can create any trail he wishes. Getting out of the canyon requires a little more discretion.

Discounting the sheer cliffs, of course, we sought out a talus pile leading to upper benches. Then we slowly switchbacked to the mesa top and then headed southward. Except for the beginning rock-wall descent, it had been the type of hike any active person can take—and easier canyon entrances undoubtedly can be found.

Granite gorges in the canyon bottoms contrast with the bright sedimentary layers of the walls up to 500 feet above. One cliff in lower Rattlesnake Canyon provides a 100-foot waterfall during wet springtimes and cloudbursts. Evidence of this is in the smooth, scoured rock at the base.

Rattlesnake Canyon is part of what the BLM calls the Black Ridge Canyon Unit, some 18,150 acres south of the river and west of Colorado National Monument. Six canyon systems drain northward to the Colorado, but only Rattlesnake has the concentration of arches. A recent "intensive" inventory of the 11-by-5-mile unit recommended its establishment as a Wilderness Study Area.

Because the area is "primarily affected only by the forces of nature," according to the inventory, a wilderness designation could be just down the road.

"Side canyons and amphitheaters allow people the opportunity to isolate themselves from the main parts of the canyon," notes the BLM. "Opportunities for solitude within a single canyon system are further accentuated by vertical isolation due to benches at various levels.

"The relatively open expanses of the mesa tops offer outstanding solitude in that people can become widely separated on a horizontal basis due to topographic and vegetative screening. Additionally, the unit's large size and broad configuration greatly increase the probability of people being able to isolate themselves."

With nobody else in the canyon now, isolation and solitude are no problem. Lack-of-people problems are more likely in case of mishaps.

District Manager Jones says there has been no development in and around Rattlesnake Canyon because of an absence of economically attractive resources and because there has been no public pressure, this probably stemming from an unawareness of its features. No oil and gas leases have been issued in the area.

The future?

"Development will depend on which designation or wildland management system is chosen," says Jones. "A wilderness designation could very much restrict recreation development, while a national natural landmark designation could provide for a road system, campgrounds, hiking trails and scenic overlooks."

These decisions must be made in the land-use planning process program beginning in 1982, with final decisions in 1987. Public response is expected to weigh heavily.

Rattlesnake Canyon is made up of a remarkable collection of rugged wildlands and delicate rock sculptures. It offers an education in how nature can work on the landscape when not interrupted by man. It is big, beautiful and interesting, and it should be appreciated—and respected.

Zeke Scher writes for the Denver Post. This article originally appeared in the Post's Empire Magazine.

Wilderness

The Untended Wealth of Nature's Novelties

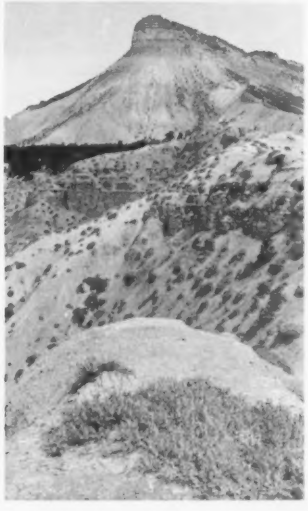
Connie Babb

Wilderness—roadless wildlands, barren desert, majestic mountain peaks, canyons and shrub-land—lying between urbanization and lush patches of farmland, make up much of America's public lands. Here one can listen to the incessant wind, explore pioneer campsites used a century or more ago and enjoy the unique wildlife that belongs to this land. Here, wildlife can roam, unimpeded by human development.

The face of the earth in what is now the United States has for centuries been traveled by people and animals, finding solitude, beauty and nourishment. Gradually at first, and more insistently in recent decades, the naturalness of the area has been changed by a variety of developments.

More recently, these vast expanses of diverse and spectacular lands, the very foundation of our development and wealth, have at last been recognized as a storehouse of national wealth that should be preserved for future generations. Through the Federal

(Left) Chopaka Lake in Chopaka Mountain Wilderness Study Area, is a 5,560 acre unit west of Oroville, Washington. Populations of mountain goats and white-tailed ptarmigan make their homes here. (Right) McKenna Peak Wilderness Study Area, San Miguel County, Colorado, is 21,900 acres of sandstone cliffs, canyons and rolling hills. The area offers such unconfined recreational activities as horseback riding, hiking, rock climbing, backpacking, hunting and photography.



Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), passed by Congress in 1976, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) was given a mandate to review the lands it administers to determine which areas are suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Recommendations based on these studies will be reported to Congress for action.

The legislation thrusts the Bureau into a new role in safeguarding the public lands—that of preserving the rare resources of undisturbed natural areas.

It has not always been this way. BLM was not mentioned in the Wilderness Act passed by Congress in 1964, even though, at that time a growing awareness had increased public concern about management of the public lands. During the 1960's, the Bureau responded to these concerns as multiple-use management was put into practice. A greater effort to preserve wild lands resulted, and the Bureau developed its own primitive and natural area systems.

Between 1969 and 1976, 11 primitive areas totaling 234,000 acres and 44 natural areas of 271,000 acres were designated. But, there was yet a long way to go in safeguarding this diminishing resource.

O nature!
Enrich me with the knowledge
of thy works;
Snatch me to Heaven.
—Thomson

Passage of FLPMA in 1976 brought the opportunity. With FLPMA, BLM was given the permanent authority to manage the lands for multiple uses, including minerals development, domestic livestock grazing, wildlife habitat, and recreation.

FLPMA also gave BLM authority to recommend lands for possible inclusion in the Wilderness System. To speed the task, BLM first developed an inventory process with two stages:

(1) an initial inventory designed to quickly identify and release from wilderness review those lands which clearly and obviously lack wilderness characteristics; and

(2) an intensive inventory for those lands which may possess wilderness characteristics.

BLM geared up to begin implementation. There were 174 million acres to be inventoried. Initial inventories that identified areas with extensive and obvious human intrusions or developments eliminated millions of acres lacking basic wilderness characteristics. This initial inventory, completed in 1979, released more than 117 million acres from further review. Accelerated reviews of certain lands where there was high interest in energy exploration were scheduled and completed. One of these reviews identified almost 10 million acres in the Overthrust Belt from further wilderness consideration. These lands were released and are now available for the full range of multiple-use activities. Much acreage inventoried is already under development for multiple uses.

As a result of all wilderness inventory efforts, the Bureau has now identified 23.7 million acres of public lands which will be carefully studied to determine which should become a part of the National Wilderness Preservation System, and which are more suitable for other uses. The Wilderness System already includes 80 million acres of Federal lands administered by other Federal agencies.

(Left) Accelerated reviews of certain lands with high interest in energy exploration opened almost 10 million acres in the Overthrust Belt to multiple use activities. This oil rig is now operating on Overthrust Belt land in Wyoming. (Right) Adobe Town WSA contains 85,710 acres of high desert plateau that provide important winter range for antelope and is home for one of the largest wild horse herds in Wyoming. Fossils and petrified wood have been found throughout the area.

About 12,000 acres of BLM public lands have already been designated as part of other designated wilderness areas, managed by either the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or the Forest Service. These areas include: 95 acres in the Weminuche Wilderness, Colorado; 1,745 acres in the Santa Lucia Wilderness, California; 10,160 acres of the Wild Rogue Wilderness, Oregon; and 113 acres in the Oregon Islands Wilderness.

There are 967 areas of BLM-administered lands which will now be carefully looked at, including all resources and uses. Recommendations will then be made to Congress—through the Secretary of the Interior and the President—as to which among the 967 areas are suitable for designation by Congress as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System, and which are not suitable.

BLM has set a 1987 goal for completion of all wilderness studies, with areas of high development interest (such as for energy development and delivery systems) scheduled in the early years insofar as possible. Many Wilderness Study Areas involve conflicts between wilderness and other potential land uses incompatible with wilderness preservation. Recent administrative changes, however, will now exempt from the non impairment standard oil, oil shale, gas, coal and mineral leases approved prior to passage of FLPMA in 1976. The loosening of environmental constraints will make it easier for companies to develop these existing leases. They are, however, still subject to the "undue and unnecessary degradation" requirements.

So on he fares, and to the border comes,
Of Eden, where delicious Paradise,
Now nearer, crowns with her enclosure green,
As with a rural mound, the champain head
Of a steep wilderness
—Milton

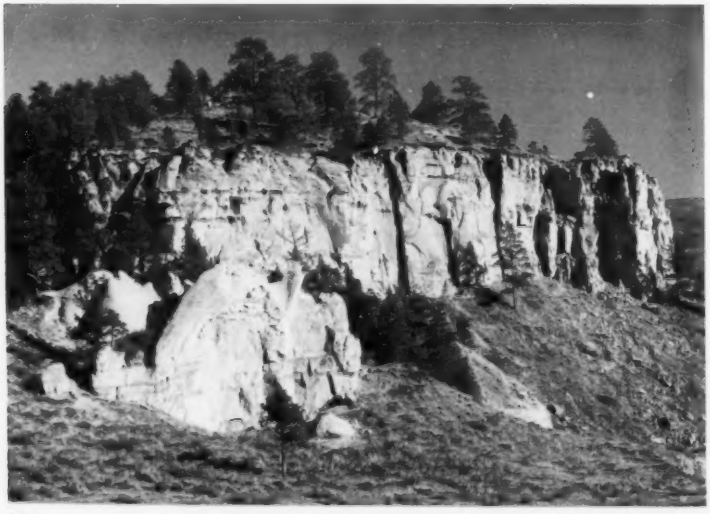
The change involves about 2.5 million acres or some 10% of lands in WSA status. Many of these leases may now be fully developed if companies can demonstrate that drilling or mining will not cause unnecessary or undue degradation of land that may be included in the wilderness system.

Although the Federal Land Policy and Management Act established a reporting deadline of 1991, BLM is programming the studies to conclude by 1987 so any resource conflicts may be resolved as soon as possible.

In the interim, the Wilderness Study Areas are managed to allow the continuation of many activities. Wilderness study status does not freeze resource development activities, but it can constrain them. Existing mineral and grazing uses are allowed to continue in the same manner and degree as in 1976, and valid existing rights are recognized. This so-called "interim management" remains in effect in each Wilderness Study Area until Congress acts on the President's recommendation at the end of the study.

Throughout the inventory process there has been a large amount of public involvement and assistance. Thousands of public

(Left) Antelope Creek WSA in Montana borders the Upper Missouri River. This 9,400 acre unit provides much habitat for wildlife and outstanding opportunities for solitude within the southern portion. (Right) Timbered Crater WSA, California contains 18,690 acres of BLM administered lands, adjacent to National Forest lands. Numerous deer herds use this area as winter range. The area contains a large lava flow which has not yet developed deep soils and is still rocky and rough.



comments have been received. Public meetings, open houses, and field trips with the public were of invaluable assistance in determining whether certain areas have wilderness characteristics.

During the further studies to determine possible wilderness areas, opportunities will be provided for full and open public participation. The Bureau considers public participation to be an essential element in every wilderness study. Under a policy published in draft form in December 1980, special consideration is given to the involvement of those local people and institutions that would be most directly affected by an area's designation. Vigorous public participation activities will be conducted by BLM. These will include surveys, public meetings, public hearings, conferences, seminars, workshops, open houses, tours, and requests for written comments. The public will be notified far enough in advance of any of these activities to allow for effective and meaningful participation.

The draft policy statement indicates that any area recommended by BLM as suitable for preservation as wilderness must be justified on the basis of benefits and manageability. The full range of public benefits which wilderness designation would provide must be sufficient to offset the benefits of other resource values and uses which could be foregone due to wilderness designation. The area must also be capable of being effectively managed to perpetually preserve its wilderness character.

Solitude is the nurse of enthusiasm, and enthusiasm is the true parent of genius. In all ages solitude has been called for—has been flown to.

—Isaac D'Israeli

BLM does not view wilderness designation as a temporary form of resource protection. Therefore, only those areas which can be lastingly managed to maintain the public benefits, which justified wilderness designation in the first place, will be recommended as suitable for designation.

This selection process is similar to the way BLM applies planning criteria for other resource programs. In developing any resource management plan, the planning criteria for all resource programs are applied concurrently and used to develop multi-program criteria for specific plans. These are then used to determine the most appropriate land use allocations for the affected public lands.

It is all too easy to take these lands for granted, leaving their freedom from roads and other development to chance. Under the BLM wilderness review, some of the remaining vast open spaces of the western landscape will be protected.

Continued public participation in the remaining process will be essential if the best and appropriate wilderness areas are to be identified so future generations will have places "where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man."

Connie Babb is a Public Information Specialist in BLM's Washington, D.C. Office of Public Affairs.

(Left) North Fork Owyhee River WSA in Idaho contains 58,851 acres of rugged mountains and rocky tableland. The lower river canyon is critical habitat for the river otter, a sensitive species, and is also a good beaver habitat. Canyon areas are also considered potential bighorn sheep habitat. (Right) Handies Peak is a 16,100 acre WSA characterized by high alpine tundra, several glacial lakes, perennial creeks and watefalls. The area is near Lake City, Colorado.

Charles Christian Nahl

The Man Who Put the Gold Rush on Canvas

Paul Herndon

In January of 1848, James Marshall found a gold nugget in the millrace of a sawmill he was building for his employer, John A. Sutter. That discovery led to the California Gold Rush of 1849.

Today it is hard to imagine the impact that news of the gold discovery in California had on Western migration. Covered wagons had been crossing the Oregon-California trail since 1842, but once the news reached the East in the winter of '48–'49, the trickle became a flood. It has been estimated that 90,000 people arrived in California between July 1, 1849 and January 1, 1850. It was the greatest mass migration to occur in an equal time frame in the history of the world.

The mass and variety of the people, the spirit of optimism that prevailed along the trail, the rowdy, boisterous life in the mining camps, have all been preserved through the paintings and drawings of Charles Christian Nahl, a German artist who also went West in search of gold.

Nahl was born in Kassel, Germany on October 13, 1818. His great-grandfather, Johan August Nahl is described as the most inventive artist in the German Rococo period. His father, George Valentin Nahl was an etcher and engraver.

Charles studied at the Art Academy in Kassel and went to Paris in 1846 to continue his studies. He immigrated in 1848 with his mother and brother.

In New York he supported himself by painting until he and his brother sailed for California in 1850.

The Argonaut* of 1850 had a choice of routes to reach California. He could travel the Oregon-California Trail. He could sail from New York to the Isthmus of Panama, cross the Isthmus by boat and mule, and then travel up the coast to San Francisco by boat. Finally, he could round Cape Horn at the tip of South America. The Nahls chose to go by way of Panama.

Crossing the Isthmus of Panama required a 44-mile boat trip up the Chagres River to Cruces. To Nahl, raised in temperate climate, the exotic vegetation of tropical Panama must have been a spectacular sight. The boat ride provided leisure time. Nahl used this time to make notes which he later used to paint a large oil, *Crossing the Isthmus of Panama By Way of the Chagres River.* It recorded a scene that those who traveled by way of Panama never forgot.

Nahl and his brother landed in San Francisco and headed for the gold mines. While working at the Rough and Ready Camp on the Yuba River in Nevada County, Nahl remained busy with sketches of life and activity around the mines.

In 1851, Nahl visited Sutter's Mill to make a number of sketches. These were used later to create a large oil painting that is considered notable for the accuracy of its detail.

Later that same year, Nahl moved to San Francisco. There he painted many portraits of miners, one may assume, for the subjects to send home to families and did local scenes (genre) which were hung in local bars and other public places. Many of these paintings were lost when fire burned down most of the town in 1852.

As the town rebuilt, Nahl was able to recreate some of these paintings from memory.

His talent was beginning to win recognition, His illustrations and paintings were in demand by publishers of newspapers, magazines and books. Since publications at the time were not printed in color, much of Nahl's work was in black and white.

Among his contributions were sketches for two books by a local humorous writer, Alonzo Delano, about his life in the mining camps. The first book was entitled *Pen Knife Sketches, or Chips Off the Old Block, A Series of Original Letters Written by One of California's Pioneer Miners.* The second was *Old Block's Sketch Book, or Tales of California Life Illustrated With Numerous Elegant Designs by Nahl, the Cruikshank*

*(a term used to describe one who went to California in search of gold)

THE FANDANGO, *1873, oil on canvas, 72" x 108". Courtesy of Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, Calif.*

of California. Although Nahl's name appeared only in the second title, he illustrated both books. Both are now collector's items.

In the books he illustrated, Nahl's drawings often took a humorous turn, but he never took liberties for the sake of humor. Thus, his work has historic as well as artistic value. After the Delano books were published, Nahl's reputation as an artist was firmly established in the mining community.

Nahl's black and white sketches, as well as his paintings, give us a better understanding of that historic phenomenon we have labeled "California Gold Rush" and a glimpse into the life of the individual forty-niner.

Among Nahl's black and white drawings are:

On the Way to the Mines. This portrays the variety of humanity one would expect to meet on the trail to prospective riches. This particular drawing shows half-naked, barefooted Indians, and pigtailed Chinese with all their worldly goods bound up in bundles hanging from poles over their shoulders. There are two white men, one riding a bony horse, the other walking. Other whites are beating a four-horse team hitched to a stalled wagon.

The Lone Miner depicts a more affluent rider on his way to the mines, his long rifle in his hand and the tools of his trade protruding from a pack on the back of a second horse.

Another drawing shows travelers pushing a stagecoach up a steep grade; another, a post rider carrying mail—for as much as $4 per letter—to the mines.

Nahl documented life in the mining camps, showing methods of mining and the men at rest and play.

Mining With a Long Tom illustrates this piece of equipment being used in placer mining. *Ejecting the Squatters* records a moment of high tension that was all too common in the raw mining camps. Miners were forced to band together to provide the only law and order that existed and to protect their mining claims from

SUNDAY MORNING IN THE MINES, *1872, oil on canvas, 72" x 108". Courtesy of Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, Calif.*

claim jumpers.

Although many of Nahl's works were done in black and white, he was also proficient in color.

Saturday Evening in the Mines painted in 1856, shows six miners at leisure in their cabin. A moon and a distant river can be seen through the open door. An open fire provides the only light. At a table, two miners watch another weighing gold dust. A forth miner quietly gets drunk, a fifth sleeps in his bunk and a sixth tends a pot of food cooking over the fire.

Sunday Morning in the Mines, painted in 1872, depicts miners engaged in other off-work pursuits. Through the door of a cabin we see a miner writing a letter, while outside the same door, two listen to a third who is reading from a book—we would guess, the Bible. Around the corner, a lone miner puffs peacefully on his pipe while others escort a drunken companion along his way. Riders race horses up a deep-rutted road, and across the road, a group is having a party—or perhaps a card game outside the door of a second cabin.

As the supply of easily obtainable gold disappeared from California's streams, many of the miners returned to the East from whence they came. Charles Nahl and his family remained and became permanent citizens of the State.

In one sense Nahl spanned two eras. He lived to see the camera come into general use and, for a time, he and his brother operated an art and photographic studio in San Francisco.

In later years he designed the bear on the California State flag.

Never married, Nahl lived with his mother until he died in 1878. He was recognized as "a man of genius" and the leading artist of the California Gold Rush.

Paul Herndon is a Public Information Specialist in BLM's Washington, D.C. Office of Public Affairs.

Public Land Sales

Tracts of public land are sold by the State Offices listed on this page. Sales are held only when land use planning indicates that the public interest will be better served by disposal of the tract in question. In light of the time involved in preparing, printing, and distributing this publication, it is impossible to report on all sales far enough in advance to give most readers an opportunity to participate. However, notices of sale will be published in the Federal Register and in local newspapers serving the community where the land being offered is located. These notices will appear at least 60 days before the sale. Currently, the only States authorized to conduct auction sales are Nevada and Wyoming.

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